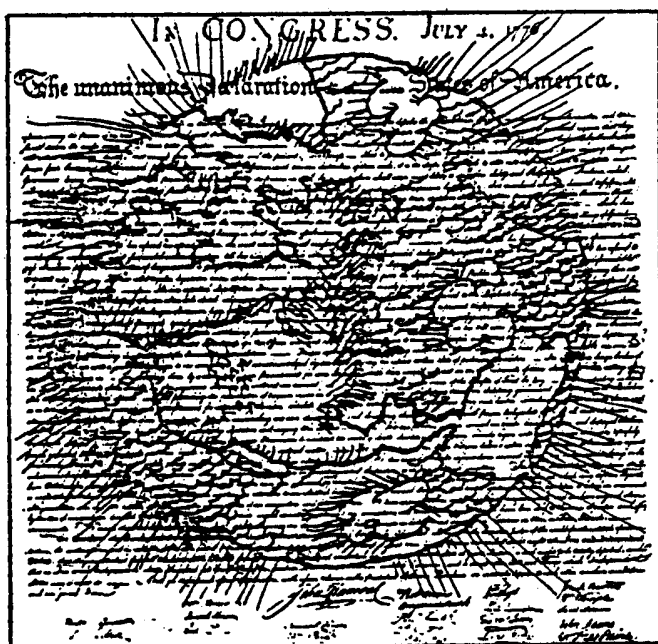


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# Thinking Aloud

## FOREIGN POLICY IN A BIPOLAR WORLD

BY GEORGE P. BROCKWAY



**B**EFORE HIS old broom sweeps it all away, Ronald Reagan should give careful thought to the possibility that some of Jimmy Carter's foreign policy—in particular the human rights program and the downgrading of CIA activities—may have a better practical base than even its sponsors imagined. What probably was conceived as born-again do-goodism may actually be the epitome of hard-headed down-to-earth practicality in the world we face today. For unlike our parents and their parents, we now live in a bipolar world. This is something new under the sun.

We have had good experience with an analogous situation in domestic politics, where it is clearly recognized that a two-party system is radically different from any other. We believe

this system gives our government a stability denied to those of, say, France and Italy. To the extent that our belief is well-founded, and that we understand the nature of the foundation, we may hope for stability in international affairs. If we misunderstand the situation, we are likely in for trouble.

From the point of view of the voter, the salient fact of two-party politics is that one is generally voting against, rather than for. To put it in its harshest light, as many recently did, one must choose the lesser of two evils. Only rarely is it possible to enter the polling booth with unbounded enthusiasm.

The resulting political atmosphere is often bland, which is another way of saying nonrevolutionary. The two parties crowd toward the center of the political spectrum and tend to become similar in their programs. That makes possible such sudden voter shifts as we experienced last November, when those who could have been expected to vote against Reagan voted against Carter because of his perceived ineffectuality.

Occasionally, true believers find ways of establishing something approaching an ideological difference between the parties, of giving voters "a real choice." Handfuls of the faithful are made ecstatic, but the usual consequence is electoral disaster. Barry Goldwater and George McGovern are roundly defeated. Few can have loved Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon, even at the height of their powers, yet vast majorities had reasons to vote against their opponents.

On reflection, the vote-against syndrome is not surprising. Quite apart from the great variety of opinion called forth by any question, all tragic or comic views of life recognize that no one is perfect, and moreover, that perfectionists never get anything done. Perfection is not to be looked for;

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